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ABSTRACT

The theme for the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) 1993-94 was to promote professionalism, collaboration, and advocacy. To facilitate these goals, the ACES president, Barbara Griffin, engaged the members in a dialogue about change--a change supportive of collaboration and advocacy, a change that called for a strong commitment to professionalism. The focus in this Digest is a paradigm shift that directs counselors to consider constructivism and the influence it could have in the fields of counseling and counselor education and supervision. Constructivism is the idea that knowledge and reality are rooted in the individual and in society. This concept is not fixed, but relative and changeable, being functions of both personal and social constructs. As professionalism encompasses both attitude and action, constructivist thought can influence the profession by making practitioners more conscious of the attitudes or values that are embedded in current counseling practice, curriculum, materials, research activities, and advocacy agenda. Constructivist thought can help counselor educators and supervisors understand their professional responsibility to the larger culture. The advocacy agenda of the profession will be shaped by this knowledge and will result in a commitment to change. Collaboration is the process by which ACES members can make it happen. (LSR)

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Promoting Professionalism, Collaboration and Advocacy

by Barbara Griffin

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Promoting Professionalism, Collaboration and Advocacy

Barbara Griffin

Introduction

The theme for the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (1993-94) was to promote professionalism, collaboration and advocacy. To facilitate the goals of professionalism, collaboration and advocacy I engaged all ACES members in a dialogue about change; a change that was inherently supportive of collaboration and advocacy, a change that called for us to make a strong commitment to professionalism. There are many changes occurring in our profession, but the change that I was referring to was a paradigm shift that directs counselors to consider constructivism and the influence constructivism could have in the fields of counseling and counselor education and supervision.

The assumption of constructivism is the idea that knowledge and reality are rooted in the individual and in society. This concept is not fixed, but relative and changeable, being functions of both personal and social constructs.

Constructivism

Preparing this message was quite a venture. I put a great deal of thought into what I could say; thus I did what all good counselors do when they are in need of assistance, I consulted.

After much consulting with colleagues, I wandered into my library to discover Lily Tomlin and Jane Wagner. I know that many of you probably have had the opportunity to read or experience Lily's and Jane's Broadway play or read the book *In Search of Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe* where Lily and Jane introduce the concept of awe-robics. Awe-robics involves the process of expanding emotionally and intellectually everyday and being in awe over the experience.

Lily says we need to be in awe over life, and "then be even deeper in awe at the capacity to be in awe about something, and then become even more awestruck at the thought that we are, in some small way a part of that which we are in awe about." The feeling goes on and on—awe infinitum, if you will (Wagner 1986, p. 205).

While Lily and Jane can philosophize on and on, I needed real substance for my message so I decided to use Lily's favorite alter-ego, Trudy, the bag lady, to accompany me mentally as a consultant in the writing of this article.

What can I say about Trudy, the bag lady? Jane and Lily describe her as "a divine release of the soul from the yoke of custom and convention" (Wagner 1986, p.18).

I'd like to share Trudy with you. I wonder if you can identify with parts of her. To me Trudy is symbolic of a

new perspective and frame of reference. Trudy refuses to be intimidated by traditional reality any more. She views reality as nothing more than a collective hunch!

Trudy thinks of the human mind as similar to like a pinata. We have to work to get it open, but when it does open up there are many surprises inside. Once we get the pinata perspective we see that loosening and expanding our minds can be a peak experience. We can begin to delight in the experiencing of awe-robics (Wagner, 1986).

During this year I would like for all of us to be more like Trudy, getting into the pinata perspective and practicing awe-robics by considering a constructivist theme in Counselor Education and Supervision.

How does constructivism relate to and influence our profession? Professionalism to me encompasses both attitude and actions; constructivist thought can influence our profession by making us more conscious of the attitudes or values that are embedded in our current counseling practice, in our curriculum and material choices, in our research activities and in our advocacy agenda. A philosophical framework of constructivism, with its contextual focus, forces the consideration of the social, cultural, psychological, economic and political circumstances upon which our professional behaviors are based.

When we consider constructivism in regard to therapeutic approaches, we view a model that focuses on each person's unique reality. This will, in turn, influence our therapeutic interventions by extending them beyond traditional psychodynamic, cognitive-behavioral and existential-humanistic views of counseling. We will continue to incorporate the important concepts of the past. The difference in the future is the answer to the old question, "What is your theoretical orientation?" The answers will be: developmental, constructivist, multicultural and systemic-contextual (Ivey & Rigazio-DiGilio, 1992, p.39).

Constructivist therapists accept the world of the client. They are more harmonious with pluralism and tolerant of diverse approaches to therapeutic intervention. Each client's uniqueness and each client's reality is tantamount. The client is not molded and circumscribed, but respected and encouraged to find individualized solutions to psychological difficulties.

Ivey & Rigazio-DiGilio (1992) state that theories stemming from constructivism stress that client cognition, emotions, and behaviors are generated in a complex network of interactions. The counselor moves from placing the client in predetermined categories to a new model that focuses on the developmental, emotional, and cognitive meaning-making system of the client along with the social factors that interact with and influence this system over time. This model of counseling gives the client's worldview primacy. Trudy, the bag lady, would like these

thoughts since Trudy knows we are what we think.

Speaking of different realities, I wasn't the only consulting job that Trudy had. She had also been hired as creative consultant to aliens from outer space. According to Trudy, aliens believe that we are what we think. Zukav (1979) quoted by Lucas (p.328, 1985) stated that "reality is what we take to be true, what we take to be true is what we believe, what we believe is based upon our perceptions, what we perceive depends upon what we look for, what we look for depends upon what we think, what we think depends upon what we perceive, what we perceive determines what we believe, what we believe determines what we take to be true, what we take to be true is our reality." My reality was so expanded after reading this interpretation of reality that I said, "Trudy, that was a great example of constructivist thought!"

Trudy's reality-gleaning aliens had been on a cosmic fact-finding mission in search of intelligent life when they contacted Trudy for her creative assistance. As the aliens and Trudy collected data about life here on earth, they attempted once and for all to find out just what it all means. Trudy wrote the collected data on Post-Its which they subsequently analyzed so they could report on the meaning of life here. Their openness to observing and their taking up the challenge of gaining an understanding of a reality other than their own would make them great constructivist teachers.

Constructivist researchers see a socially constructed world and quest to find the forces that construct the consciousness. They attempt to use their understanding of the social construction of reality to rethink and reconceptualize the types of questions asked about the counseling process. Constructivist researchers seek a system of meaning which grants a new angle, a unique insight into the social consequence of different ways of knowing, different forms of knowledge and different approaches to research. Constructivist research operates on the assumption that the knower and the known are inseparable (Kincheloe, 1991).

One of the central tasks of the constructivist researcher is to formulate questions which expose the conditions which promote social, political, and educational advantages and disadvantages. The constructivist researcher analyzes how knowledge conceals or distorts the social, political and economic status quo. They choose strategies of inquiry that recognize the ambiguity of the human condition, the nature of knowledge, the importance of context, and the fact that outcomes of the inquiry may not be quantifiable or replicable (Kincheloe, 1991).

Constructivist researchers see themselves as passionate scholars who connect themselves emotionally to that which

they are seeking to know and understand. To the constructivist researcher, knowledge is an entity which should be constantly challenged, redefined, and negotiated by all participants in social and educational settings.

Conclusion

Counselor educators and supervisors can consider this connectedness and use strategies that uncover those often-concealed, social constructs that promote educational and social disadvantage. We must critically re-think our current knowledge base and practices with the purpose of understanding ourselves and our relationship to the larger whole. Constructivist thought can help us understand this connection and our professional responsibility to the larger culture. Our advocacy agenda will be shaped by this knowledge and will result in a commitment to change. Collaboration is the process by which we can make this all happen. This incorporation of professionalism, collaboration, and advocacy provided the foundation for my goals as president in 1993-94. Trudy and the aliens said that they could see the importance of moving toward a world where people could work and learn together, a world where inhabitants establish economic and social conditions that make possible individual freedom and social empowerment. I know that the ACES membership has been and will continue to be a vital part of this change process.

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